**Segment for Week of 2 August 2021**

**Squash Vine Borer**

This is Julie Callahan bringing you information on shore friendly living and gardening from the Master Gardeners and Virginia Cooperative Extension. Did your squash plants suddenly wilt even though they have plenty of water? It could be the dreaded squash vine borer! Listen in for everything you ever wanted to know about the squash vine borer, including what you can do to control them!

**Squash vine borer,** is a type of moth that lays its eggs at the base of squash plants. When the eggs hatch, the larvae burrow (or “bore”) into the lower stems, weakening and girdling the stem or runner or killing the plant outright. Larvae feed internally causing dieback of the vine, but infestation of the main stem will kill the plant. Infested plants may have more than one larva and bacterial decay can invade through the entrance holes. Often an infested plant will wilt and die before any damage is noticed. Examine the vine for wet, pulpy frass (fecal material) at borer entrance holes to distinguish squash vine borer damage from bacterial or Fusarium wilt diseases.

Squash vine borer attacks many different types of cucurbits: summer squashes, pumpkins and winter squashes, and gourds. Sometimes it is found in muskmelons or other melons. Hubbard squash is a preferred host plant while cucumbers and butternut squash are largely avoided. Management of squash vine borer can be difficult in small-scale production as just a few adult moths can infest many plants, which then have little chance for survival. Home gardens with only a few squash plants are more likely to lose entire crops than commercial fields with a larger number of plants set out.

In general, cultural control methods are more effective in managing squash vine borer than relying on chemical controls. Here are a few options:

1. Plant early with transplants, if possible; plantings made in early spring may bear a crop before squash vine borer can kill the vines. If feasible, consider a late planting of cucurbits after the main flight period of squash vine borer, when adult females have finished laying eggs.
2. Floating row covers can be used to exclude the female moths from laying eggs at the base of the vines. However, row covers must be removed to allow pollinators to visit the blossoms.
3. Consider rotating fields of cucurbits annually with non-cucurbit crops to avoid squash vine borer overwintering in the same ground each year, but these adults are highly mobile and will likely find squash fields at some point during the growing season.
4. Promptly crush or otherwise destroy any plants killed by squash vine borer to kill larvae still within the vines before they enter the soil to pupate. Spading, tilling or disking in early fall will kill pupae in the soil and suppress adult populations the following spring.
5. A trap crop of Hubbard squash (Cucurbita maxima) can be planted to attract squash vine borer away from summer squash. The goal is to have the Hubbard squash in a more attractive stage of development than the cash crop when the squash vine borer arrives. Treat or destroy the trap crop after the peak egg-laying period to kill any developing larvae before they enter the soil to pupate.

For answers to Gardening questions call your local Accomack or Northampton

County Extension Office. Here on the Shore call either 678-7946 or 787-1361

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